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SUBJECT: PACOM COMMANDER ADM FALLON MEETING WITH ROYAL THAI  
SUPREME COMMAND

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a May 3 meeting with Royal Thai Supreme Commander GEN Chaisit Shinawatra, PACOM Commander ADM William Fallon pressed for an answer to CJCS Gen. Myers letter requesting Thailand to send staff officers to man the multinational headquarters for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

Chaisit suggested that the delay in response was due to Thailand recently naming a new Defense Minister and suggested the U.S. raise the point again with MOD. ADM Fallon also urged Thailand to select the F-16 in its ongoing fighter aircraft competition. The Deputy Supreme Commander from the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) agreed that the F-16 made more sense for Thailand than either the Swedish Gripen or the Russian SU-30. The RTAF hopes the United States will continue to support the annual Cope Tiger joint/combined air exercise. The Royal Thai Navy (RTN) asked for help in upgrading Utapao Royal Thai Naval Air Station. ADM Fallon agreed to send a team to Utapao to look at possible improvements that would benefit both U.S. and Thai uses of the facility. The Royal Thai military also seeks help in counter terrorism training and equipment. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) ADM Fallon began the meeting by noting the importance of military-to-military relations between the United States and Thailand and explaining that he scheduled his first visit to Thailand early in his tenure as Pacific Commander to reinforce the importance of our bilateral relationship. GEN Chaisit echoed Fallon's comments about the importance of our relationship, calling our ties "unbreakable." Chaisit then turned to his senior service member staff, asking them to outline key issues of concern.

SERVICE PRIORITIES: ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE WANTS TO KEEP COPE TIGER

13. (C) ACM Anubhond Snidwongse, Deputy Supreme Commander, began by explaining the importance the RTAF places on our largest annual joint/combined air exercise, Cope Tiger. Anubhond explained that Cope Tiger is a multinational exercise involving Singapore that offers training opportunities for Thai and American pilots unavailable elsewhere. While appreciative of regular invitations from the United States to participate in the Cope Thunder air exercise in Alaska, Anubhond said that Thai pilots learn more by training in environments similar to those at home. Anubhond also suggested that Cope Tiger affords American pilots the benefits of practicing maneuvers over terrain that is different from what they encounter in the United States.

14. (C) ADM Fallon explained that he had ordered his staff to make a comprehensive overview of all exercises under PACOM control. While noting the importance he places on using exercises to give his flag officers command opportunities, ADM Fallon stressed the equal benefits joint/combined exercises afford U.S. forces by improving tactical abilities and strengthening cooperation with allies. He also noted his desire to expand joint training in combined exercises to improve service integration. He assured Anubhond that, as he gathered information from his staff, he would also seek input from Thai service commanders through JUSMAGTHAI and DAO to make sure he was also aware of their training priorities. Speaking as a naval aviator, ADM Fallon said he was well aware of the benefits gained from training with other countries. He also noted the importance of pilots becoming familiar with new technologies that have revolutionized air warfare. He mentioned a recent opportunity he had had to test fly an F-14D that was compatible with the Joint Tactical Information Distribution System (JTIDS), which integrates communication, navigation and identification codes for multi-service use. JTIDS and similar technologies, ADM Fallon explained, allow pilots to get a real picture of the entire battlefield and make decisions they could not make before. It will be even more important in the future, ADM Fallon suggested, for allies to improve familiarity and integration of technologies that have improved the pilot's awareness of the battlefield, and thus aircraft like the F-16 which have these capabilities make sense as Thailand looks to the future.

ROYAL THAI NAVY WANTS TO IMPROVE UTAPAO FACILITIES

15. (C) ADM Satirapan Keyanon, Deputy Supreme Commander, pointed out that much of the equipment at Utapao Royal Thai Naval Air Station is old. Compounding problems, the RTN's maintenance budget had not been sufficient to keep pace with needed improvements, especially upgrades to the air traffic control systems. Satirapan noted that transiting U.S. aircraft land at Utapao almost daily and that Utapao was the hub for U.S. relief efforts during the tsunami crisis. He expressed hope that PACOM could help the RTN improve Utapao. ADM Fallon thanked the RTN for allowing the use of Utapao during the tsunami aftermath and agreed to dispatch a small team to look at Utapao and to share ideas with RTN experts. Satirapan was visibly pleased and said he looked forward to welcoming the team.

#### THAIS WANT HELP FIGHTING TERRORISM

16. (C) GEN Boonsrang Niumpradit, RTSC Chief of Staff, said that the Thai military's most pressing need was for improved training and equipment to counter terrorism. ADM Fallon expressed his view that redirecting training to create more agile and quick-thinking units that can seize opportunities rapidly was his top training priority. He emphasized that such training was more important than anything else we could do to beat terrorism. He also emphasized the need to improve intelligence cooperation and suggested that this was an area where the United States might offer even more assistance. Boonsrang welcomed the news and expressed his hope that subject matter expert meetings on intelligence might be set up soon. Chaisit agreed indicating his J2 could work to facilitate better information exchanges.

#### IRAQ

17. (C) ADM Fallon reminded Chaisit that CJCS Gen. Myers had sent a letter to Thailand asking them to contribute staff officers to man the multinational headquarters for OIF. Chaisit acknowledged his Government's delay in responding, suggesting that the delay was due to the recent cabinet reshuffle that named GEN Thamarak Isarangura Na Ayutthaya as Defense Minister. Chaisit said an answer might be coming shortly from the Defense Minister. In a pull-aside with PolMilOff later, GEN Boonsrang suggested that the U.S. should press this issue with Thamarak soon to get a response.

#### F-16

18. (C) ADM Fallon told Chaisit that, from an interoperability standpoint, the F-16 was the best choice for Thailand to make in its ongoing competition to select a new fighter aircraft. ACM Anubhond agreed, saying that he personally would much rather have an American plane than a Swedish or Russian one and that the F-16 makes more sense for the RTAF from a logistics and pilot training standpoint as well. (NOTE. Anubhond's comments echo those we've heard from other RTAF officers -- if the decision were left up to the RTAF, the F-16 would win easily. However, pressure from the Commerce Ministry and the Prime Minister's office may result in the procurement decision being made for business reasons, not military ones. END NOTE.)

#### THAI-TAC

19. (C) LTG Kemarat Kanchanawat, RTSC J3, told ADM Fallon that Thai-TAC, our annual bilateral military-to-military talks, would take place in Honolulu this year. He pledged to work to make Thai-TAC more strategic in focus, to include discussion of facilities like the Interagency Intelligence Fusion Center in Northern Thailand and the possible construction of a Maritime Operations Intelligence Fusion Center focused on the Andaman Sea.

10. (U) ADM Fallon has cleared this message.  
BOYCE